

DEAR RAYMOND

Ray Chandler was born one hundred years ago today, and Hemingway's birthday was

Thursday. Quite a big week for my boys. However, there's hardly anything tragic

about birth, at least by comparison, so I dedicated this weekend to the two who

have most assisted my career. Especially through you, Ray, have I advanced myself.

And so, to your honor — a rereading of selected passages, some hard expressions

in the mirror, destruction of the mind and body with drink and exotic foods.

(Sorry, Ray, nothing here for a gimlet, and no hard stuff except my heart, so

the cheap red will have to do.) Finally I offer the terrible loneliness of a city

not your home, oceans of debt, a romantic soul with ugly temperament, self-deception,

and for dessert a sweet dollop of doggerel. This is the least I can do. See you soon.

HEMINGWAY'S BIRTHDAY

I was driving home in the heat of a long day of teaching, and it took a dj's list of birthdays to remind me: Yusuf Islam, Don Knotts, Ernest Hemingway. But all the news isn't bad, Papa: today Neil Armstrong carved the moon, and Jesse James emptied his first locomotive. Oddly, my calendar remembers only your death, and neglects a July morning in a

north Michigan town.
But tonight, again,
you serve as inspira-
tion. I try to smile,
considering what you
would think of us
many professors, fat
and educated, blazing
trodden moons, looting
empty trains.

— Gay Brewer

Columbus OH

LAST DAYS OF OSCAR WILDE

Paris, 1900.

The cafe's been closed half an hour.
Overturned chairs rest on the metal tables.
The waiter stands with his back to the bar
arms folded, lips pursed, glaring.
Under the green canvas awning
a single customer sits
with his empty glass, his stack of saucers
his unpaid bill.
Streams of water dribble
from the frayed edges of the awning.
The waiter curses once, twice, shouts
to this customer, who doesn't hear
& so goes on
staring into the rain.
The waiter inserts the crank
rolls the awning back.

TAXI

I climb in a taxi
downtown out to the airport
lugging suitcase & briefcase;
the driver
is young, black, subdued
we move thru empty streets
past redbrick buildings graffitied

then onto the Expressway
dawn at our backs
not a word